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בשבת



אור ישראל

Self Inspired

PARSHAS
VAYEITZEI

BY RABBI NETANEL NAAMAT
RABBI NAFTALI ZIONS
RABBI AVICHAI BENSOUSSAN

THE RUDIMENTS OF RELATIONSHIPS

In *Parshas Vayeitzei* we join the travels of *Yaakov Avinu*, as he runs to, and then from, his uncle Lavan. In fact, starting with *Parshas Vayeitzei*, *Yaakov Avinu's* life is fraught with difficulties. His brother wants to kill him, and his uncle is out to cheat him. *Yaakov's* life doesn't become any easier in the following *parshiyos*, with his daughter kidnapped, his children waging war against an entire city, his beloved son sold into slavery, culminating in his leaving *Eretz Yisrael* for *Mitzrayim*.

What started this journey? In the previous *parsha*, Rivkah approached *Yaakov* and implored that he impersonate his brother in order to receive the *berachos* from his father *Yitzchak*. *Yaakov* protested, but finally agreed to his mother's plan. This forced *Yaakov* to run for his life when his brother *Eisav* decided to kill him. This was the beginning of the saga that caused his interaction with Lavan, his travels near *Shechem*, his wife *Rochel* dying during the travels and ultimately, his move to *Mitzrayim*.

R' Shlomo Assulan¹ is perplexed by this sequence of events. What wrong did *Yaakov* do that he should have been thrown into such turmoil? *Yaakov* was sitting and learning Torah when his mother asked him to do something that he personally would never do. Because of his mother's request, and because it was the right thing to do, he acquiesced. And thanks to this, he was on the run, the rest of his life fraught with difficulties.

R' Assulan explains that this was not a punishment at all. Rather, *Yaakov Avinu* was ready for the next stage of his life. For many years, *Yaakov* was the "איש תם" — the man of the tent. He spent his days learning and understanding Hashem's ways. This was foundational in his relationship to Hashem, the Torah and *mitzvos*. However, as the forebearer of *Klal Yisrael*, it was time for *Yaakov* to grow in his relationship to his fellow man. How would *Yaakov* navigate the trials brought on by his dealings with his brother, his uncle, his neighbors, and his own children? And *Yaakov's* example would create the foundation for the Jewish nation for all eternity.

Through his terrible ordeals, *Yaakov Avinu* showed us the way; *mitzvos* between a person and their friend are integral to the soul of the Jewish nation. And when we improve in these areas, we are uplifting ourselves, and uplifting our people as well.

¹ *Kuntris Mayan Ganim, Vayeitzei*

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Mind the Gap - Taking the Next Step

The challenges that come with interpersonal relationships are many and varied. The call to 'improve' or 'grow' in this area is broad and intricate, as broad and intricate as the relationships themselves. How can one find successful growth in such a complicated undertaking?

If a person views the entire universe of human interaction as a single conglomerate, one can quickly become overwhelmed in their endeavor to become a better person. "I'll never be consistently soft-spoken, kind-hearted, charitable, and easygoing. Why bother?!"

But if we take a small piece of the bigger picture, it becomes much more manageable. If we choose a small part of *bein adam l'chaveiro*, (for example, not speaking ill of others) and then a small part of that as well (for example, choosing a specific time when one will be extra vigilant in their speech), the goal now becomes within reach.¹

¹ *Lifelines*, by Avi Shulman, pg. 138

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Our remedy is Mussar — to strengthen our clarity, to recognize truth, to conquer the Yetzer Hora, and to genuinely serve Hashem. - R' Yehuda Zev Segal zt"l, Manchester Rosh Yeshiva, Sefer Yirah Vodaas pg. 45

IN IT FOR THE LONG HAUL

My son was a bright kid,* smart and interested in learning. However, he wasn't particularly motivated, and more often than not, he would prefer to read a good book than learn a *Tosfos*. It wasn't atypical for a teenager his age, but he was about to graduate school and spend at least a year learning, immersed in Torah. As his father, I was concerned for his spiritual growth — how would he fare throughout his life if he didn't create a strong Torah foundation for himself?

These concerns led me and my wife to consult with his Rebbi, who also happened to be his principal. We sat in a classroom after school hours, my wife and I at student's desks, and Rabbi Barish behind the teacher's desk.

"I'm concerned for Yehuda, and I'm not exactly sure where he should go next year. As you know, he's very bright and capable, so I'm thinking about a yeshiva that has a strong emphasis on learning. I expect that if he is surrounded by strong learning, he too will join their ranks. What are your thoughts?"

Rabbi Barish nodded while listening. "My thoughts? I hear what you are saying, but... what do you think, Mrs. Safier?"

"My husband is correct, Yehuda is very capable. But I would like to add that he is also very caring and sincere, and I think it would be worthwhile to find a place that can cultivate his good *middos*."

Rabbi Barish smiled broadly. "I think what your wife is saying is true, Avi," he said to me. "Not that you are wrong, but I've been teaching for a bit over three decades now. There are many good *yeshivos* out there, and some are good for one personality type, and some are good for others. I can tell you, though, that if you feel that Yehuda is ready for a 'career' in Torah learning, it is important for him to go to a yeshiva that not only teaches Torah with depth, but they also focus on *middos* and character development."

We talked some more, and finished up the conversation. On the drive home, my wife and I discussed our options, and some of the *yeshivos* that Rabbi Barish mentioned. Finally, when we arrived home, we discussed the matter with Yehuda himself.

It's been over twenty years since that point in time, and although we'll never know what would have happened had Yehuda gone to the yeshiva I had in mind, I can say that Yehuda has thrived where he did end up going. And like Rabbi Barish predicted, to mine, my wife's, and Yehuda's great delight, Yehuda indeed has a career in learning.

**Based on a true story, names have been changed.*

DID YOU KNOW?

- The obligation to act properly to others preceded the obligations of the Torah by twenty six generations.¹
- Torah learning will not last in a person who does not fix their *middos*.²

¹ *Vayikrah Rabbah* 9:3, see *Maharzu ibid.* s.v. כ"ו דורות

² *Rabbeinu Yonah* on *Avos* 3:17 s.v. אם אין דרך

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